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PETER KROPOTKIN



Kropotkin in his Study

PETER KROPOTKIN's first political book, 'Paroles d'un Révolté'—a collection of articles from 'Le Révolté', the paper he had founded in Geneva in 1879—was published in France in 1885, while he was serving a five-year prison sentence. It has been translated into nearly all the main languages of the world but, though most of its nineteen chapters have appeared in English at various times and in various places as articles or pamphlets or both, there has never been a complete translation. The first English-language edition of the whole book will be published by the Libertarian Book Club of New York next year, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Kropotkin's death, under the title 'Words of a Rebel' (copies will of course be available from the Freedom Press).

This edition is being prepared by Nicolas Walter, of the London Anarchists, a contributor to 'Freedom' and 'Anarchy' for many years, who has recently prepared a new edition of Kropotkin's 'Memoirs of a Revolutionist' (to be published by Dover Publications of New York later this year). Most of the shorter chapters are being translated afresh, and some of these new translations will be printed in another 'Freedom' pamphlet supplement in the coming months. Today we begin with the preface by Elisée Reclus, which was dated October 1, 1885, was first published in the book later the same month, and was reprinted in 'Le Révolté' on October 11/24, 1885.

WORDS OF A REBEL

Preface by Elisee Reclus

FOR TWO AND A HALF YEARS Peter Kropotkin has been in prison, cut off from the society of his fellow-men. His punishment is hard, but the silence imposed on him concerning the things he cares about most is much harder: his imprisonment would be less oppressive if he were not gagged. Months and years may perhaps pass before the use of speech is restored to him and he can resume interrupted conversations with his comrades.

The period of forced seclusion which our friend has to undergo will certainly not be wasted, but it seems very long to us! Life quickly goes by, and we sadly watch the weeks and months running out when this voice—so proud and honest among the rest—cannot be heard at all. In its place, how many common-

places will be repeated to us, how many lying words will afflict us, how many biased half-truths will ring about our ears! We long to hear one of those sincere and forthright tongues which boldly proclaim the truth.

But if the prisoner of Clairvaux no longer has the freedom to speak to his comrades from the depths of his cell, they can at least remember their friend and recall the words he spoke before. This is a task which I am able to perform, and I have devoted myself to it with pleasure. The articles which Kropotkin wrote from 1879 to 1882 in the 'anarchist' paper *Le Révolté* seemed to me ideal for publication in book form, especially because they did not run after chance events but followed a logical order. The vigour of the thought gave them the necessary unity. Faithful to the scientific method, the author first explains the general situation of society, with its scandals and defects, its elements of discord and war; he studies the evidence of collapse shown by states, and shows us the cracks opening in their ruins. Then he pushes the experience offered by contemporary history in the direction of anarchic evolution, indicates

its exact significance, and draws the lessons which it teaches. Finally, in the chapter 'Expropriation', he sums up his ideas, which derive from both observation and experience, and appeals to men of good will who want not just to know, but also to act.

I do not wish to sing the author's praises here. He is my friend, and if I said all the nice things I think about him I might be suspected of blindness or accused of partiality. It would be enough for me to report the opinion of his judges, even his jailers. Among those who have observed his life, from far or near, there is no one who does not respect him, who does not bear witness to his high intelligence and to his heart which overflows with kindness, no one who does not acknowledge him to be truly noble and pure. Anyway, is it not because of these very qualities that he has known exile and imprisonment? His crime is to love the poor and weak; his offence is to have pleaded their cause. Public opinion is unanimous in respecting this man, and yet it is not at all surprised to see the prison gates closing remorselessly on him, so that it seems natural that superiority has to be paid for and devotion has to be accompanied by suffering. It is impossible to see Kropotkin in the prison yard and to exchange greetings with him without wondering: 'And what about me, why am I free? Could it be perhaps because I am not good enough?'

However, the readers of this book should pay less attention to the personality of the author than to the value of the ideas he expresses. These ideas I recommend with confidence to honest people who do not make up their minds about a work before opening it, or about an opinion before hearing it. Clear away all your prejudices, try to stand aside temporarily from your interests, and read these pages simply looking for the truth without bothering for the time being about its application. The author asks only one thing of you—to share for a moment his ideal, the happiness of all, not just of a few privileged people. If this desire, however fleeting it may be, is really sincere, and not a mere whim of your fancy, an image passing before your eyes, it is probable that you will soon agree with the writer. If you share his yearnings you will understand his words. But you know in advance that these ideas will bring you no honour;

they will never be rewarded with a well-paid position; they may well bring you instead the distrust of your former friends or some cruel blow from your superiors. If you seek justice, you can expect to suffer injustice.

At the time when this work is being published, France is in the middle of an election crisis. I am not so naive as to recommend the candidates to read this book—they have other 'duties' to perform—but I do invite the electors to take a look at *Words of a Rebel*, and I would particularly draw their attention to the chapter called 'Representative Government'. There they will see how far their confidence will be justified in these men who are springing up on all sides to solicit the honour of representing their fellow-citizens in Parliament. At the moment all is well. The candidates are omniscient and infallible—but what about the deputies? When they at last receive their share of the kingdom, will they not be fatally afflicted by the dizziness of power and, like kings, be deprived of all wisdom and all virtue? If they decided to keep all those promises which they made so lavishly, how would they maintain their dignity in the midst of a crowd of petitioners and advisers? Even supposing that they went into Parliament with good intentions, how could they emerge without being corrupted? Under the influence of that atmosphere of intrigue, they can be seen turning from left to right, as if they were impelled by an automatic mechanism—clockwork figures who come out looking proud and strike noisily in front of the clock face, then soon afterwards go round and disappear pathetically into the works.

Choosing new masters is no solution at all. It is we anarchists, enemies of Christianity, who have to remind a whole society which claims to be Christian of these words of the man whom they have made a God: 'Call no man Master, Master.' Let each man remain his own master. Do not go to the offices of bureaucrats, or the noisy chambers of parliaments, in the vain hope for the words of freedom. Listen rather to the voices which come from below, even if they come through the bars of the prison cell.

ELISEE RECLUS.

Clarens (Switzerland), October 1, 1885.

KROPOTKIN ON ORDER

FROM WORDS OF A REBEL

WE ARE OFTEN reproached for accepting as a label this word *anarchy*, which frightens many people so much. 'Your ideas are excellent', we are told, 'but you must admit that the name of your party is an unfortunate choice. Anarchy in common language is synonymous with disorder and chaos; the word brings to mind the idea of interests clashing, of individuals struggling, which cannot lead to the establishment of harmony.'

* * *

Let us begin by pointing out that a party devoted to action, a party representing a new tendency, seldom has the opportunity of choosing a name for itself. It was not the *Beggars of Brabant* who made up their name, which later became so popular. But, beginning as a nickname—and a well-chosen one—it was taken up by the party, accepted generally, and soon became its proud title. It will also be seen that this word summed up a whole idea.

And the *Sans-culottes* of 1793? It was the enemies of the popular revolution who coined this name; but it too summed up a whole idea—that of the rebellion of the people, dressed in rags, tired of poverty, opposed to all those royalists, the so-called patriots and Jacobins, the well-dressed and the smart, those who, despite their pompous speeches and the homage paid to them by bourgeois historians, were the real enemies of the people, profoundly de-

spising them for their poverty, for their libertarian and egalitarian spirit, and for their revolutionary enthusiasm.

It was the same with the name of the *Nihilists*, which puzzled journalists so much and led to so much playing with words, good and bad, until it was understood to refer not to a peculiar—almost religious—sect, but to a real revolutionary force. Coined by Turgenev in his novel *Fathers and Sons*, it was adopted by the 'fathers', who used the nickname to take revenge for the disobedience of the 'sons'. But the sons accepted it and, when they later realised that it gave rise to misunderstanding and tried to get rid of it, this was impossible. The press and the public would not describe the Russian revolutionaries by any other name. Anyway the name was by no means badly chosen, for again it sums up an idea; it expresses the negation of the whole of the activity of present civilisation, based on the oppression of one class by another—the negation of the present economic system, the negation of government and power, of bourgeois politics, of routine knowledge, of bourgeois morality, of art for the sake of the exploiters, of fashions and manners which are grotesque or revoltingly hypocritical, of all that present society has inherited from past centuries: in a word, the negation of everything which bourgeois civilisation today treats with reverence.

It was the same with the anarchists.

When a party emerged within the International which denied authority in the Association and also rebelled against authority in all its forms, this party at first called itself *federalist*, then *anti-statist* or *anti-authoritarian*. At that period they actually avoided using the name *anarchist*. The word *an-archy* (that is how it was written then) seemed to identify the party too closely with the Proudhonians, whose ideas about economic reform were at that time opposed by the International. But it was precisely because of this—to cause confusion—that its enemies decided to make use of this name; after all, it made it possible to say that the very name of the anarchists proved that their only ambition was to create disorder and chaos without caring about the result.

The anarchist party quickly accepted the name it had been given. At first it insisted on the hyphen between *an* and *archy*, explaining that in this form the word *an-archy*—which comes from the Greek—means 'no authority' and not 'disorder'; but it soon accepted the word as it was, and stopped giving extra work to proof-readers and Greek lessons to the public.

So the word returned to its basic, normal, common meaning, as expressed in 1816 by the English philosopher Bentham, in the following terms: 'The philosopher who wishes to reform a bad law,' he said, 'does not preach in-

surrection against it . . . The character of the anarchist is quite different. He denies the existence of the law, he rejects its validity, he incites men to refuse to recognise it as law and to rise up against its execution.' The sense of the word has become wider today: the anarchist denies not just existing laws, but all established power, all authority; however its essence has remained the same: it rebels—and this is what it starts from — against power and authority in any form.

* * *

But, we are told, this word brings to mind the negation of order, and consequently the idea of disorder, of chaos.

Let us however make sure we understand one another—what order are we talking about? Is it the harmony which we anarchists dream of, the harmony in human relations which will be established freely when humanity ceases to be divided into two classes, of which one is sacrificed for the benefit of the other, the harmony which will emerge spontaneously from the unity of interests when all men belong to one and the same family, when each works for the good of all and all for the good of each? Obviously not! Those who accuse anarchy of being the negation of order are not talking about this harmony of the future; they are talking about order as it is thought of in our present society. So let us see what this order is which anarchy wishes to destroy.

Order today—what they mean by order—is nine-tenths of mankind working to provide luxury, pleasure, and the satisfaction of the most disgusting passions for a handful of idlers.

Order is these nine-tenths being deprived of everything which is a necessary condition for a decent life, for the reasonable development of intellectual faculties. To reduce nine-tenths of mankind to the state of beasts of burden living from day to day, without ever daring to think of the pleasures provided for man by scientific study and artistic creation—that is order!

Order is poverty and famine become the normal state of society. It is the Irish peasant dying of starvation; it is the peasant of a third of Russia dying of diphtheria and typhus, and of hunger following scarcity—at a time when stored grain is sent abroad. It is the people of Italy reduced to abandoning their fertile countryside and wandering across Europe looking for tunnels to dig, where they risk being buried after existing for only a few months or so. It is the land taken away from the peasant to raise animals to feed the rich; it is the land left fallow rather than being restored to those who ask for nothing more than to cultivate it.

Order is the woman selling herself to feed her children, it is the child reduced to being shut up in a factory or to dying of starvation, it is the worker reduced to the state of a machine. It is the spectre of the worker rising against the rich, the spectre of the people rising against the government.

Order is an infinitesimal minority raised to positions of power, which for this reason imposes itself on the majority and which raises its children to occupy the same positions later, so as to main-

tain the same privileges by trickery, corruption, violence and butchery.

Order is the continuous warfare of man against man, trade against trade, class against class, country against country. It is the cannon whose roar never ceases in Europe, it is the countryside laid waste, the sacrifice of whole generations on the battlefield, the destruction in a single year of the wealth built up by centuries of hard work.

Order is slavery, thought in chains, the degradation of the human race maintained by sword and lash. It is the sudden death by explosion or the slow death by suffocation of hundreds of miners who are blown up or buried every year by the greed of the bosses—and shot or bayoneted as soon as they

dare complain.

Finally order is the Paris Commune drowned in blood. It is the death of thirty thousand men, women and children, cut to pieces by shells, shot down, buried in quicklime beneath the streets of Paris. It is the fate of the youth of Russia, locked in the prisons, buried in the snows of Siberia, and—in the case of the best, the purest, and the most devoted—strangled in the hangman's noose.

That is order!

* * *

And disorder—what they call disorder?

It is the rising of the people against this shameful order, bursting their bonds, shattering their fetters, and moving towards a better future. It is the most

Translator's Notes

'L'Ordre' was first published in *Le Révolté* on October 1, 1881, a few weeks after Kropotkin had been expelled from Switzerland and had settled at Thonon on the French side of Lake Geneva. It was reprinted as the ninth chapter of

A general point of interest is that the paradoxical contrast of order and disorder here anticipates Kropotkin's later contrast of authoritarian and libertarian currents throughout history. It also foreshadows the parallel conceptions of topia and utopia in Gustav Landauer's *The Revolution* (1907) and of entropy and revolution in Yevgeni Zamiatin's *On Literature, Revolution and Entropy* (1924). This is a dualistic view of human development which is characteristic of libertarian thought and is quite different from the dialectical view of the Marxist tradition—instead of a progressive process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, there is a perpetual conflict of thesis-antithesis-thesis.

A few points of detail are worth explaining. The Beggars were the Dutch rebels against the Spanish regime in the late sixteenth century. The Sans-culottes were the most radical republicans in the French Revolution. The Nihilists were the Russian populists of the 1860s and 1870s. Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* was first published in Russia in 1862. The International referred to is the First International—the 'International Working Men's Association'. The tunnels referred to are the railway tunnels of the late nineteenth century—the Mont Cenis tunnel through the Alps was opened in 1871, and the St. Gotthard tunnel in 1882. There were risings throughout Europe in 1848. The Paris Commune rose and fell in 1871. The assassins of Tsar Alexander II—some of whom were old friends of Kropotkin—were hanged in April, 1881.

One last point—the Bentham quotation comes from *Anarchical Fallacies*, a critical examination of the various *Declarations of the Rights of Man* made during the French Revolution. It was written before 1808, but first published in 1816 in a French translation by Etienne Dumont, a Swiss writer who produced French versions of many of Bentham's manuscripts. It appeared in *Tactiques des assemblées législatives*, suivie d'un *Traité des sophismes politiques* (Geneva, 1816); the second volume, which contained the *Traité des sophismes politiques*, included *Sophismes anarchiques*. The passage quoted by Kropotkin attacked Article One of the Declaration of the Rights of Man made in 1791—'Men are born and remain free, and equal in respect of rights'. *Sophismes anarchiques* was omitted from the English version of the *Traité des sophismes politiques*—The Book of Fallacies (London, 1824)—but Bentham's original version was included in the second volume of John Bowring's standard edition of The Works of Jeremy Bentham (Edinburgh, 1843). The passage is translated here exactly as Kropotkin gave it, though he quoted Dumont's version slightly inaccurately, and Dumont had translated Bentham's manuscript very freely; what Bentham actually wrote was as follows: 'The rational censor, acknowledging the existence of the law he disapproves, proposes the repeal of it: the anarchist, setting up his will and fancy for a law before which all mankind are called to bow down at the first word—the anarchist, trampling on truth and decency, denies the validity of the law in question,—denies the existence of it in the character of a law, and calls upon all mankind to rise up in a mass, and resist the execution of it.'

N.W.

glorious deeds in the history of humanity.

It is the rebellion of thought on the eve of revolution; it is the upsetting of hypotheses sanctioned by unchanging centuries; it is the breaking of a flood of new ideas, of daring inventions, it is the solution of scientific problems.

Disorder is the abolition of ancient slavery, it is the rise of the communes, the abolition of feudal serfdom, the attempts at the abolition of economic serfdom.

Disorder is peasant revolts against priests and landowners, burning castles to make room for cottages, leaving the hovels to take their place in the sun. It is France abolishing the monarchy

and dealing a mortal blow at serfdom in the whole of Western Europe.

Disorder is 1848 making kings tremble, and proclaiming the right to work. It is the people of Paris fighting for a new idea and, when they die in the massacres, leaving to humanity the idea of the free commune, and opening the way towards this revolution which we can feel approaching and which will be the Social Revolution.

Disorder—what they call disorder—is periods during which whole generations keep up a ceaseless struggle and sacrifice themselves to prepare humanity for a better existence, in getting rid of past slavery. It is periods during which

the popular genius takes free flight and in a few years makes gigantic advances without which man would have remained in the state of an ancient slave, a creeping thing, degraded by poverty.

Disorder is the breaking out of the finest passions and the greatest sacrifices, it is the epic of the supreme love of humanity!

* * *

The word *anarchy*, implying the negation of this order and invoking the memory of the finest moments in the lives of peoples—is it not well chosen for a party which is moving towards the conquest of a better future?

Translated by NICOLAS WALTER.

THE SITUATION

FROM WORDS OF A REBEL

IT IS CERTAIN that we are marching with great strides towards revolution, towards an upheaval which, breaking out in one country, will spread as in 1848 into all the neighbouring countries and, shaking present society to its foundations, will end by renewing the sources of life.

To be confirmed in this idea we do not even need to invoke the testimony of a celebrated German historian¹ or of a well-known Italian philosopher,² both of whom, after investigating modern history, have come to the conclusion of the inevitability of a great revolution towards the end of this century. We only need to observe the picture which has been unfolded before our eyes during the last twenty years; we only need to look at what is happening around us.

We can state then that two dominant facts emerge from the gloomy background of the canvas: the awakening of the peoples, alongside the moral, intellectual and economic bankruptcy of the ruling classes; and the ineffectual, dying efforts of the leisured classes to prevent this awakening.

* * *

Yes, the awakening of the peoples.

In the stifling factory, as in the dark kitchen, in the storehouse, as in the dripping mine-shaft, a whole new world is today being worked out. Among those dark masses—whom the bourgeoisie despises as much as it fears them, but from whom has always come the breath which inspired the great reformers—among them the most difficult problems of political economy and of social organization have been posed, have been discussed, and have received new solutions dictated by the feeling of justice. The wounds of present society are being lanced to the quick. New aspirations are being produced, new conceptions being sketched out.

Opinions intersect and diverge to infinity; but two main ideas are already sounding more and more distinctly through the clamour of voices: the abolition of individual property, or communism, on one hand; and, on the other, the abolition of the state, the free commune, the international union of working people. The two paths converge towards the same goal—*equality*. Not that hypocritical formula for equality inscribed by the bourgeoisie on its banners and in its codes so as to enslave the producer more effectively; but real equality—land, capital, and work for all.

The ruling classes have tried to stifle these aspirations in vain. In vain they have imprisoned men and suppressed writings. The new idea is penetrating men's minds and filling men's hearts, as once the dream of a free rich land in the East filled the hearts of the serfs when they flocked to the ranks of the Crusaders. The idea may slumber for a time; if it is prevented from reaching the surface, it can burrow underground; but this will be in order to reappear soon, more vigorous than ever. Look only at the reawakening of socialism in France, this second awakening in the short space of fifteen years. The wave which falls one moment rises yet higher the next. And from the time that the first attempt to put the new idea into practice was made, the idea arose in the sight of everyone in all its simplicity, with all its virtues. Only a single successful attempt—and the consciousness of their strength will give the people a heroic

inspiration.

That moment cannot be delayed for long. Everything is bringing it nearer: poverty itself, which forces the unfortunate to consider their situation, and even unemployment, which tears thinking people from the narrow confines of the workshop and throws them into the streets, where they learn to know the vices and at the same time the weakness of the ruling classes.

* * *

And in the meantime what are they doing, these ruling classes?

While the natural sciences are taking a leap forward which is reminiscent of the last century at the approach of the great revolution; while daring inventors every day are opening up new horizons in man's struggle against the hostile forces of nature—bourgeois social science remains silent: it is chewing over its old theories.

Are they perhaps progressing, these ruling classes, in practical life? Far from it. They are obstinately determined to wave their tattered flags, to defend egoistic individualism, the competition of man with man and of nation with nation, the omnipotence of the centralizing state.

They move from protectionism to free trade, and from free trade to protectionism, from reaction to liberalism and from liberalism to reaction; from atheism to superstition and from superstition to atheism. Always fearful, always looking backwards at the past, always more and more incapable of putting into practice anything that can last.

Everything that they have done has been a flat contradiction of what they had promised.

They had promised, these ruling classes, to guarantee freedom of work—and they have made us slaves of the factory, the boss, the overseer. They undertook to organize industry and guarantee our standard of living—and they have given us endless crises and poverty; they promised us education—and have made it impossible for us to educate ourselves; they promised us political liberty—and have dragged us from reaction to reaction; they promised us peace—and have brought war, war without end.

They have broken all their promises.

* * *

But the people are sick and tired; they are wondering what has become of them, after letting themselves be fooled and ruled by the bourgeoisie for so long.

The answer is to be found in the present economic situation of Europe.

The crisis, previously a temporary disaster, has become chronic. Crisis in cotton, crisis in metal, crisis in watchmaking—all the crises are now breaking out at the same time, and are becoming a permanent feature.

One can count in millions the number of people without work at the present time in Europe; and in tens of thousands the number of those who tramp from town to town begging, or rioting to demand with threats 'Work or bread!' Just as the peasants of 1787 tramped the roads in thousands without being able to find in the rich land of France, which had been monopolized by the aristocrats, a patch to cultivate or a tool to till it with—so today the worker is empty-handed and cannot get hold of the raw material or the instruments of labour which are necessary to work it but which are monopolized by a handful of idlers.

¹Gervinus: *Introduction to the History of the Nineteenth Century*.

²Ferrari: *Reason of State*.

Great industries are killed stone dead, great towns like Sheffield are depopulated. Poverty in England—in England above all, for it is there that the 'economists' have put their principles into practice most completely; poverty in Alsace; famine in Spain and Italy. Unemployment everywhere; and with unemployment comes need, or rather poverty—pale-faced children, women aged another five years by the end of a single winter; disease cutting down the workers in great sweeps—that is what has become of us under the present system.

And then they talk to us of overproduction! Overproduction? When the miner who piles up mountains of coal cannot treat himself to a fire in the harshest winter? When the weaver who weaves miles of cloth has to refuse his ragged children a shirt? When the bricklayer who builds a palace lives in a hovel, and the seamstress who makes the finest dressed dolls has only a worn shawl to protect her against the elements?

Is that what is called the organization of industry? It would be better to call it the secret alliance of the capitalists to subdue the workers by hunger.

* * *

Capital, this product of the labour of the human species, accumulated in the hands of a few, runs away from agriculture and industry—we are told—for lack of security.

But where then is it to go when it emerges from the safes?

Good heavens! there are more profitable investments! It will go to furnish the Sultan's harems; it will go to foment wars, to support Russian against Turk and, at the same time, Turk against Russian.

Or yet again, it will go one day to found a company of shareholders, not to produce anything in particular, but simply to lead in two years to a scandalous liquidation, as soon as the big shots who promoted the company have retired, taking with them the millions which count as a fair return for floating the scheme.

Or perhaps this capital will go to build useless railways, at St. Gotthard, in Japan—in the Sahara if necessary—provided that the Rothschild backers, the chief engineer, and the contractor each get a few millions out of it.

But above all, capital will be thrown into speculation—the great game on the stock exchange. The capitalist will speculate on an artificial rise in the price of corn or cotton; he will speculate on politics, on the rise produced as a consequence of some rumour of a reform or some diplomatic note; and very

often—as we see every day—it will be members of the government itself who will plunge into these speculations.

Speculation killing industry—that is what they call intelligent management of business! That is why—as they tell us—we must maintain them!

* * *

In short, the economic chaos is at its peak.

However, this chaos cannot last much longer. The people are sick and tired of suffering these crises, provoked by the greed of the ruling classes: they would like to live by their work, and not by suffering years of poverty, seasoned with humiliating charity, for two or three years of exhausting work, sometimes more or less secure, but always very badly rewarded.

The worker notices the incapacity of the ruling classes—the incapacity of understanding new aspirations; the incapacity of managing industry; the incapacity of organizing production and exchange.

The people will soon proclaim the downfall of the bourgeoisie. They will take matters into their own hands, as soon as the right moment appears.

This moment will not be long delayed, because of the very disease which consumes industry, and its arrival will be hastened by the decomposition of the states, the galloping decomposition which is taking place in our time.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

The French revolution on February 1848 was followed by risings in most of the countries of Europe. Georg Gottfried Gervinus (1805-1871) was a German historian who suffered persecution for his liberal views; his *Einleitung in die Geschichte der neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* was published in 1853 (a new edition appeared in 1967). Giuseppe Ferrari (1811-1876) was an Italian philosopher who suffered exile for his liberal views; his *Histoire de la raison d'état* was published in Paris in 1860. The French socialist movement, which was suppressed after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, revived in the late 1870s and the early 1880s. Increasing distress among the landless peasants of France was one of the causes of the revolutionary movement which began with the economic crisis and the Assembly of Notables in 1787. The last Russo-Turkish war was fought from 1876 to 1878. The St. Gotthard railway through the Alps was built from 1872 to 1882.

N.W.

POLITICS AND SOCIALISM

The following article appeared in three editions of FREEDOM, February to May, 1903. Peter Kropotkin was at that time a member of the editorial board of the paper.

We think this article is still relevant today and the points he makes about parliament and Social-Democratic Parties are equally important. It was published at the time when FREEDOM had a sub-title 'Journal of Anarchist Communism' and Kropotkin's use of the word Socialism should be seen in the context.

IT WAS IN 1871—immediately after the defeat of France by the Germans, and of the Paris proletarians by the French middle classes—that a conference of the International Working Men's Association, secretly convoked by Marx and Engels, instead of the usual annual Congress, and the composition of which had been cleverly manipulated for the purpose, met in London. This conference decided that the Working Men's Association, which had hitherto been a revolutionary association for the International organisation of the struggle of labour against capitalism, should become henceforward a series of national organisations for running Social-Democratic candidates in the different Parliaments.

Thirty years have passed since this step was taken. And we can fully appreciate by this time the results of the new tactics.

* * *

The main argument in favour of it was that the working men were not prepared to accept the ideas of Socialism: that consequently a long preparatory period was required in order to spread these ideas; and that—to say nothing of the prestige of Members of Parliament—periods of elections, when everyone's interest in public affairs is awakened, are the best moments for spreading broadcast Socialist ideas.

To this the working men, especially those of France and Spain, replied that the International Working Men's Association, such as it was, had already been excellent for the propaganda of

Socialism. In less than three years it had awakened the conscience of the workers' interests all over Europe; it had done more for the theoretical elaboration of the principles of Socialism, and for the practical application of Socialistic principles, than fifty years of theoretical discussions. It had immensely contributed to the spreading of the idea of international solidarity of interest amongst the workers of all nations, and of an international support of their strikes; of International Labour opposed to International Capitalism. Besides, the strikes, especially when they attain great dimensions and are supported internationally, awake general attention, and are infinitely better opportunities for spreading broadcast Socialist ideas than electoral meetings, in which, for the very success of the election, Socialists will often be compelled to compromise with the middle classes—to parliament, and to practise¹ with them. In the struggle for political power Socialism would soon be forgotten—it was foretold—for some spurious teachings in which Radical political reforms would be mixed up with some palliative laws (hours of labour, compensation for accidents, and so on) might be enforced upon the Parliaments in a much more effective form if the labour unions took everywhere the great extension which an International propaganda in this direction could give them.

* * *

It is for a good reason that we are here re-stating these arguments at such a length. Every one of them has had, within the last thirty years, its full confirmation.

See what has become of theoretical Socialism—not only in this country, but in Germany and Belgium as well, amidst those who take part in the elections under the etiquette of Socialism. There is less of it left than there ever was in a Fabian pamphlet. Who speaks now of Socialism, with the exception of the Anarchists, who precisely therefore are described as Utopians, if not as fools! In 1869-71 you could not open one single Socialist paper without finding on its very first page this discussion:—

Whether we must, and if we must—how shall we expropriate the owners of factories, the mines, the land? Then—and this was especially important—every legislative measure, every political event was discussed from the point of view, whether it was leading to, or leading away from, the aim in view—the Social Revolution. Of course, everyone was extremely interested in obtaining shorter hours and better wages for every branch of trade; everyone passionately took the part of strikers all over the world; the International was indeed a permanent international strike—an international conspiracy, if you like, for reducing hours, increasing wages, obtaining respect for the workers' freedom, and limiting the powers of Capital in every direction. Of course, everyone was passionately interested, too, in widening political liberties, and this is why the International was frankly anti-Imperialist. But it was also something else. It undertook, as its own speciality, the spreading of those ideas, and the conquest of those rights, which neither the old type trade unions nor the political Radicals sufficiently cared for. The Labour Party,



Friends visiting Kropotkin

thirty years ago, had its own special functions, in addition to Trade-unionism and Radicalism, and these were Socialism—the preparation of the Social Revolution. But where is it now? All gone! What is now described as Socialism—all of them are Socialists now!—is the most incoherent mixture of trade-unionism, which trusts no more to itself, and looks for a John Gorst¹ to make its business with Toryism—the paternal State to whom you must look for every improvement of your conditions—with State capitalism (State monopoly of railways, of banks, of the sale of spirits, of education, etc., is preached and fought for by the Socialist Party of free Switzerland) with Fabianism, nay, even occasionally with Imperialism, when Socialists declare in the German Reichstag that let the State only declare war, they will all fight as well as the Junkers! Add to this all sorts of theories built up with bits of metaphysics for persuading the workers that a Social Revolution is bosh; that Socialism is only good for a hundred years hence, and those who talk about it now are dangerous Utopians; that all capitals must first be concentrated in a few hands—which every intelligent man sees they never will—and that the peasant owners must disappear, and all become even more miserable than they are now, before Socialism becomes possible. This is what has now taken the place of the distinctly expressed idea: 'The land, the mines, the factories, everything that is wanted for living, must return to the community, which by local action and free agreement, must organise free communistic life and free communistic production.'—Is this progress?

* * *

If the working men of Europe and America had only the so-called Socialist and Social-Democratic parties to rely upon for the triumph of the Socialist idea, the general position would be really desperate. We certainly are the first to recognise that the Social-Democratic Party in Germany is doing excellent Republican propaganda, and that, as a Republican party, it splendidly undermines the authority of the petulant William.² We gladly acknowledge that the Parliamentary Socialists in France are thorough Radicals, and that they do excellent work for the support of Radical legislation, thus continuing the work of Clemenceau and Rank, with the addition of some genuine interest in the working classes; they are Radicals, sympathetic to the

workers. But who is doing work in the Socialist direction? Who is working for bringing the masses nearer and nearer to the day when they will be able to take hold of all that is needed for living and producing? Who contributes to the spreading of the spirit of revolt among the workers? Surely not the parliamentarian!

* * *

THE ONLY ONE possible reply to this question is this: It is the Labour movement in France, in Spain, in America, in England, in Belgium, and its beginnings in Germany, and the Anarchists everywhere, who, despite all the above-mentioned dampers, despite all the confusion that is being sown in the ranks of Labour by clever *bourgeois*, despite all the propaganda of quietness and all the advices of deserting their fighting brothers, continue the old, good, *direct* fight against the exploiters. The great desperate colliers' strike in America has done more to shake the authority of trusts, and to show the way to fight them, than all the talk in the talking assemblies. The attempts at general strikes in Belgium (despite the opposition of the politicians), at Milan (despite the treason of the leaders), at Barcelona, and at Geneva, have done infinitely more for spreading conviction in the necessity of a complete expropriation of the exploiters than anything that has ever been said in or out of a parliament by a parliamentary leader. The refusal of 400 Geneva militia soldiers to join the ranks, and the attitude of those fifteen who have been bold enough to tell the martial Court that they would never join the ranks of their battalions for fighting against their brother workers—such facts of revolt are doing infinitely more for the spreading of true Socialism than anything that has been, or will ever be said by those Socialists who seek their inspiration in the speeches and the review articles of a John Gorst. Of course, it is those Anarchists whom the would-be Socialists hate so much for not having followed them in the middle-class 'evolution'; of course, it is those blessed Anarchists who have their hand in these movements, and go to prison like Bertoni in Geneva and scores of our brothers in France and Spain. Yes, it is true they have a hand in these movements, and 8,000 workers on strike in Madrid shouted, the other day: *Long live Anarchism!* This is true. But they are proud to see that the workers trust them more than they trust their gloved 'representatives'.

* * *

. . . Socialism has been circumscribed and minimised since it became the watchword of a political party, instead of, as formerly, the popular Labour movement. Now, when Socialism is spoken of, all that is meant is: State railways, State monopoly of banks and spirits, perhaps, in a remote future, State mines, and plenty of legislation intended to slightly protect Labour—without doing the slightest harm to Capitalism—and at the same time bringing Labour as much as possible into a complete submission to the present middle-class Government of the State. State arbitration, State control of the Trade Unions, State armies for working the railways and the bakeries in the case of strikes, and like measures in favour of the Capitalists, are, as is known, necessary aspects of 'Labour legislation', in accordance with the well-known programme of Disraeli, John Gorst, 'The People' and like Tory swindlers.

To understand Socialism, as it was understood thirty years ago—that is, as a deep revolution which would free man by reconstructing the distribution of wealth, consumption and production on a new basis—is now described by the 'Neo-Socialists' as sheer nonsense. We have now 'scientific Socialism', and if you would know all about it, read a few 'authorised version' pamphlets, in which the guessings which Fourierists, Owenites, and Saint-Simonians used to make sixty years ago concerning the concentration of capital, the coming self-annihilation of capitalism, and like naive predictions—retold in a far less comprehensible language by Engels and Marx—are represented as so many great scientific discoveries of the German mind. Only, alas, owing to these would-be discoveries, the teaching which formerly, by its Communistic aspirations, inspired the masses and attracted the best minds of the nineteenth century, has become nothing but a mitigated middle-class State capitalism.

* * *

To speak now of the Social Revolution is considered by the 'scientific' Socialist a crime. Vote and wait! Don't trouble about the revolution; revolutions are mere inventions of idle spirits! Only criminal Anarchists talk of them now. Be quiet and vote as you are told to. Don't believe these criminals who tell you that owing to the facilities of exploitation of the backward races all over the world, the numbers of capitalists who

climb on the necks of the European working man are steadily growing. Trust to the Neo-Socialists, who have proved that the middle-classes are going to destroy themselves, in virtue of a 'Law of self-annihilation' discovered by their great thinkers. Vote! Greater men than you will tell you the moment when the self-annihilation of capital has been accomplished. They will then expropriate the few usurpers left, who will own everything, and you will be freed without ever having taken any more trouble than that of writing on a bit of paper the name of the man whom the heads of your fraction of the party told you to vote for!

To such shameful nonsense the politician Socialists have tried to reduce the Great Revolution which calls for the energies of all the lovers of freedom and equality.

* * *

And in the meantime reaction tries to take the fullest advantage of these suicidal preachings. It concentrates its forces all over the world. Why should it not? Where is the revolutionary party which might be capable of appealing to the people against its oppressors? And so it takes hold of all the channels of power which the present State provides for the ruling middle classes.

Look at education! They destroy with a sure and clever hand all that had been done in 1860-1875 for wresting instruction out of the hands of the clergy. Why should they not, when it was the once redoubtable but now tamed Socialist politicians who have helped at the last election the Conservatives to be so powerful in Parliament? The School Board teacher had ceased to tell the poor, 'Suffer, it's the will of the creator that you should be poor'. On the contrary, he told them, 'Hope: try yourselves to shake off your misery!' The slum mother began to get into the habit of going to the School Board teacher to tell of her needs and sorrows, instead of going to the parson, as she formerly did. Down, then, with the School Boards! And why not? Why should they not dare anything when they know that it was the Socialists, the politicians who had helped them to win such a power in Parliament! Even in France, where they ostensibly fight to free the schools from the clergy, the best and largest colleges are in the hands of the Jesuits—within a stone's throw of the Chamber of Deputies. Everywhere the middle class return to religion, everywhere they work to bring the clergyman, with his ignorance and his eternal fire, back to the school—and the working men are told to take no interest in these matters, to *laissez faire* and to study John Gorst's programme of paternal State legislation.

There was in the years 1860-1875 a powerfully destructive force at work—the materialistic philosophy. It produced the wonderful revival of sciences, and led to the wonderful discoveries of the last quarter of a century. It induced men to think. It freed the minds of the workers . . . 'Down, then, with Materialism', is now the outcry of the middle classes. 'Long live metaphysics, long live Hegel, Kant, and the Dialectic method!' Why not? They know that in this direction, too, the reaction will find no opposition from the Neo-Socialists. They are also dialecticians, Hegelians, they also worship economic metaphysics, as has been so well shown by Tcherkesoff in his 'Pages of Socialist History'.

Happily enough, there is one element in the present life of Europe and America which has not yielded to political corruption. It is the Labour movement, so far as it has hitherto remained strange to the race for seats in Parliament. It may be that here and there the workers belonging to this movement give support to this or that candidate for a seat in a parliament or in a municipality—but there are already scores of thousands of working men in Spain, in Italy, in France, in Holland, and probably in England too, who quite consciously refuse to take any part, even for fun, in the political struggle. Their main work lies in quite another direction. With an admirable tenacity they organise their unions, within each nation and internationally, and with a still more admirable ardour they prepare the great coming struggle of Labour against Capital: the coming of the international general strike.

One may judge of the terror which this movement, unostensibly prepared by the workers, inspires in the middle classes, by the terrible persecutions—which have not stopped even at torture—which they have carried on against the revolutionary trade unions in Spain. One may judge of that terror by the infamous repression of the Milan insurrection which was ordered by King Umberto, or by the measures which were going to be taken against railway strikers in Holland.³ These measures, as is known, were prevented by the splendid act of international solidarity accomplished by the British Dock Labourers' Union, and

immediately followed by the menacing declarations of the General Union of the French Syndicates. It hardly need be said that all the Parliamentary Socialists of France, Germany, Spain, &c., headed by the famous Millerand and Jaurès (one year ago this last was for the general strike—now he writes long articles against it) bitterly oppose this idea of a general strike. But the movement spreads every month and every month it gains new support and wins new sympathies.

* * *

Our first intention was to conclude by a general review of the so-called Labour-protecting legislation in different countries, and to show how far this legislation is due to the Socialist politicians on the one side, and to the direct pressure exercised by the Labour agitation on the other.

Such a study would have been deeply interesting. Not that we should attribute to this legislation more importance than it deserves. We have often proved that any such law, even if it introduces some partial improvement, always lays upon the worker some new chain, forged by the middle-class State. We prefer the ameliorations which have been imposed by the workers upon their masters in a direct struggle; they are less spurious. However, it is also easy to prove that even those little and always poisoned concessions which have been made by the middle classes to the workers, and which are now represented as the very essence of 'practical, scientific' Socialism, stand in no relation to the numerical forces of the political Socialist parties. Such concessions as the limitation of the hours of labour, or of child labour, whenever they represent something real, have always been achieved by the action of the trade-unions—by strikes, by labour revolts, or by menaces of a labour war. They are labour victories—not political victories.

* * *

If there was a work in which the conditions of labour and the recent labour legislation were given for each country, it would have been easy to prove the above assertion by a crushing evidence of data. But no such work exists, and consequently we have to mention but a few striking facts.

Our readers will have seen what a substantial reduction of the hours of labour in the mines was achieved by the great miners' strike of Pennsylvania, and, by the way, the effect which the strike has had upon other branches of American industry. That such long hours as twelve, every day of the week (including Sundays), should have existed in Pennsylvania, we need not wonder when we are reminded that every year the Eastern States receive thousands of fresh immigrant miners from Germany and Austria, where, notwithstanding the presence of so many Democrat-Socialists in Parliament, the hours of labour are outrageously long. But precisely because there are no such political go-betweens in the United States the Pennsylvania strike could last long enough to end in a substantial victory for the labourers. The twelve hours' day exists no more in the mines of Pennsylvania.⁴

* * *

The same applies to Britain. All the little victories which the working men have won for the last fifty years, were won by the force of their trades unions, and not of Socialist politicians. Of course, it would not be fair to compare the conditions of labour in Britain and in Germany; two countries, one of which has no Social-Democratic Party in its Parliament, but has a number of strongly-organised trade unions, while the other has no less than fifty-three Social-Democratic representatives in the Reichstag, and boasts of two million Social-Democratic electors, but is only just beginning to develop (in opposition to the politicians) its trade-union movement.

It would not be fair to insist upon the incomparably better conditions of labour in this country, because the Labour movement and industry itself are so much older in England. But still, we can ask, what results have the numerous Social-Democratic deputies obtained from Parliament for the protection and personal emancipation of the labourer in Germany. The nullity of such results is simply striking, especially in comparison with the promises which have been made, and the hopes which were cherished by many sincere working men.

Everyone remembers the Eight Hours' Day Movement which was started in Europe in 1889-1890. Beginning at Chicago in 1887, where it cost the lives of five of our best Anarchist brothers, it came to Europe in the shape of a First of May demonstration—a sort of one-day general strike of all working men, which had to be made for the propaganda of an eight hours' day. The enthusiasm of the first demonstration in Hyde Park on May 1, 1890, must be fresh in the minds of many, and by this time we surely would have been in a fair way towards the realisation of that

demand, were it not for the political Socialists who saw in the eight hours' movement a plank to step on for getting into Parliament, and did their best to nip the movement in the bud.

The attitude of the German Socialist politicians at the time was most typical. They were in mortal fear lest the eight hours' movement should become a Labour movement, over which they would have no control; they hated the very idea of a general strike for the purpose of reducing the hours of labour, and they hammered into the workers' heads, 'legal eight hours! legal eight hours!' They said, 'Only vote for us, and for those whom we shall recommend to you! Discipline! And then you will see. In 1891 you will have the eleven hours' day, in such a year a ten hours' day, then a nine hours' day, and in 1903 you will have the eight hours' day, without having all the troubles and the sufferings of the strikes.' This is what Engels and Liebnecht promised them and printed plainly in their papers.

Well, up to now they have not yet got even the nine hours' day and the weekly half-holiday! . . . In Russia, the despotic Government of the Tsar, under the pressure of strikes, has passed directly from a thirteen and fourteen hours' working day to one of eleven hours, even though it still treats strikes as rebellions. . . . But where is the eight hours' law in Germany? As distant in the future as it is in Russia! Much more distant, at any rate, than it is in Spain, which has only a handful of impotent Social-Democrats in Madrid, but has, in return, powerful labour organisations in all its leading industries.

* * *

Spain is especially instructive on this account. Since the times of the foundation of the International, it has had strong labour organisations in Catalonia, keeping in close touch with the Anarchists, and always ready to support their demands by strikes, and sometimes by revolts. Everyone remembers, of course, the continual strikes—labour wars would even be more correct—which took place so many times at Barcelona, the desperate measures to which the Government resorted against the Catalonian working men during the Montjuich tortures,⁵ and the latest attempts at a general strike.

Now, the result of all this is that the eight hours' day has been fought for long since (more than ten years ago) and introduced in all the building trades of Barcelona, and although it was lost during the Montjuich prosecutions, it was recovered again two years ago, and is nearly general now in these and several other trades. Moreover we have read during the past few days in the daily telegrams that in Arragonia the nine hours' day, now in force there, is to undergo a further reduction. Does it not compare favourably with the promised *legal* nine hours' day in Germany?

Happily enough, the German workers begin to lose faith in the promises of the politicians. Their trade unions, which were formerly so bitterly opposed by the Marxists, are meekly courted by them now, since they number over 1,000,000 men (this is the figure given by the *Reformer's Year Book*), and they seem to be so little under the influence of the Social-Democratic leaders that, after all they have heard from them about the uselessness of strikes and the wickedness of a general strike, they sent the other day their hearty congratulations and promises of support to their Dutch brothers who had proclaimed the general strike in Holland. As to the intellectual and social movement which is going on in connection with the more advanced trade unions in Germany, it seems to be a subject of deep interest.

Striking facts could be mentioned from the labour history of France, to show how the young labour organisations, the strikes, and the labour revolts were instrumental in wresting from the middle class rulers a number of concessions; but space forbids us to mention more than one fact.

Up to 1883 trade unions and all sorts of associations of more than nineteen persons were strictly forbidden in France. Only in 1883, the restriction was abolished by the law of the syndicates, and from that time began the present labour movement, the

agricultural syndicates (1,500,000 members now), the Labour Exchanges and the rest. And if you ask any politician what induced, in 1883, the Opportunist Ministry to take this far-reaching step you will be told that it was the Anarchist movement at Lyons (for which fifty of us were imprisoned in 1882), the unemployed processions in Paris under the black flag, during one of which Louise Michel 'pillaged' a baker's shop, and perhaps above all that, the secret labour organisations which sprang up and rapidly spread among the miners of Montceau-les-Mines and in all the mining basin, and resulted in a series of explosions. . . . Guesde and his friends, at that time, were still most hopelessly putting forward their candidatures after each strike.

* * *

The conclusion is self-evident. We saw what results Socialist politics have given for the theoretical propaganda. Just as the name of 'Republic', which formerly meant social equality, taken up by middle-class politicians, was gradually deprived by them of its social meaning, and was shaped into a sort of middle-class rule, so also the word 'Socialism' has become in the hands of the Socialist politicians a sort of mitigated middle-class exploitation. They are all Socialists now, but Socialism is gone, and the most confused ideas prevail now among the Social-Democrats concerning the sense of this great war-cry of the workers.

And now we find that although parliamentary action is represented as necessary for obtaining small concessions to the advantage of the worker, these concessions, however insignificant they may be, have been won, all of them, by strikes (such as the match girls', the miners', the dock labourers', and so on) and by the standing menace of still more serious labour wars. The presence of a number of more or less Socialistic deputies in the parliaments does not, it appears now, dispense the working man in the least maintaining his trade organisations in full mental and material readiness for war. On the contrary, it is only by the constant menace of a war declaration, and by real war—and in proportion to this readiness—that the workers have won any victories; while the tactics of the politicians have always been to weaken the anti-capitalist labour organisations, under the pretext of political discipline. As to this country, by their abominable tactics, prompted by Engels and Marx, of arraying at election times all their forces against the Radicals and the Liberals, which was equal to supporting the Conservatives, they have done their best to pave the way for the present Imperialism, and they have got their heavy share of responsibility for the heavy blows which the Conservative Government has struck lately at the security of the labour organisations. It is never too late to mend; but it takes some time to mend the harm that has been done by mistaken politicians.

¹John Gorst—Minister of Education 1895 to 1902.

²Kaiser Wilhelm II.

³In March 1903 transport workers, and all other workers in State owned industries, having come out in support of a dockers' strike after winning all their demands, were subsequently threatened with anti-strike legislation.

⁴This strike was described in the supplement to FREEDOM, May 1903: 'Clarence Darrow calls it "a victory unparalleled in the history of strike settlements", and "a practical recognition of the union".' The strike lasted five months with 147,000 men involved. Victory brought an eight hour day for pumpmen and firemen and 10 per cent pay increase. The strike also ended the employment of little girls of 12 and 13 and even 10 and 11 in the mines.

⁵These tortures followed the wholesale arrests of Anarchists and anti-clericals after a bomb was thrown during the procession on Corpus Christi Day in Barcelona in 1892, killing seven working-class people and a soldier. The real thrower of the bomb was never found. In the Montjuich dungeons those arrested were subjected to hideous treatment from which several died. Others were killed at official executions.

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